FATHER HIDALGO IN FRONT OF THE CHURCH OF DOLORES

The 44 foot long tile mural entitled, "Father Hidalgo in Front of the Church of Dolores," is comprised of approximately 300 hand made tiles each measuring 12 inches square by one inch thick, and weighing close to ten pounds. These tiles were produced in a studio set up in Santa Cruz County expressly for this purpose and were fired in electric kilns to a temperature over 2000 degrees.

The mural is a representation of Father Hidalgo y Costilla mustering his insurgent army in front of the Church of Dolores in Guanajuato on the night of September 15, 1810, commonly known as "El Noche Del Grito." Many of the figures depicted are specific characters who actually participated in the events that evening. Others I have chosen to include because of the enormous contributions they had made to the movement for independence.

In order for this event to be seen in its historical perspective, it should be known that for months prior to this auspicious evening, secret meetings had been taking place in Querretaro and other Mexican cities. Doña Josefa Ortiz de Dominguez (who is represented to the far right in the mural) was an active participant in these meetings. Her daughter, behind her, was betrothed to Captain Ignacio Allende, an officer in the Queen's Dragoons stationed in San Miguel. (We see Captain Allende on the front horse on the mural's left side.)

These meetings were attended chiefly by Criollos--people of Spanish ancestry, yet born in America. The Criollos were dissatisfied with Spain's rule over Mexico; specifically the imposition of high taxes upon them--the funds being used to finance Spain's alliance with France in battle with the English. Furthermore, Mexicans were no longer allowed to produce such products as wine and olive oil since that would put them in competition with Spain. To emphasize this, Father Hidalgo's own vineyard was ordered cut down.

The rising dissatisfaction resulted in plans being laid to carry out an armed revolt in October of that year. These plans were thwarted when a cache of arms was discovered by Spain's Royalist Soldiers in the home of Epimenio Gonzales (Gonzales is pictured in the center with a spear in his left hand). Alarmed, Doña Josefa sent a message to Hidalgo with Ignacio Perez (who is pictured on horseback behind Allende) to alert Hidalgo--who had played an important role in the collecting of arms--of his imminent arrest.

Ignacio Perez arrived in Dolores around midnight, together with Juan Aldama who had accompanied him from San Miguel (Juan Aldama is center figure with vertical rifle). When Perez and Aldama went to deliver the message to Father Hidalgo, it is said that Hidalgo opened the window of his office and shouted out to the passerby that the only recourse was to commence immediately with war against Spain.

Hidalgo gathered the members of his household, including his younger brother José Mariano, and Ignacio Allende who was staying with him. They went to the jail and released the prisoners and took some guns from the armory. But the majority of his band was comprised of Indians from near the city of Dolores who had come to town the previous day to take part in the feast day of the Virgin of Dolores. (In the mural, these participants are represented on the far right surrounding the woman making tortillas.) The area of cornstalks to the right symbolizes the Indian culture and religion in pre-hispanic times.

At 5:30 a.m., El Cojo Galvan, the church bell ringer and alter boy, sounded the bell to call the people to church to attend Mass (in the mural he is pictured behind Hidalgo holding a lamp). Hidalgo appeared before the people at the church and summoned them to battle. A replica of this bell has been installed here in the Plaza to commemorate this historic night.

The musicians who were in Dolores for the feast day are represented in the mural because they were present at the Declaration of War. Also they symbolize the importance of music in the everyday life of the Mexican people.

Other significant characters I have chosen to depict include: Doña María Tomasa Estevez y Salas, who in 1814 was to become a commissioned officer in the troops of Salamanca and eventually to be captured and beheaded as were many others. She is depicted holding a tilted scale representing the political injustice of the times.

José María Morelos y Pavon, a mulatto, is pictured in the mural on Hidalgo's left, next to Aldama. He was a student of Hidalgo's when he was Rector of the University of San Nicolas. He was to distinguish himself as an outstanding officer, taking the City of Acapulco with less than one thousand men, many of whom were mulattos and Negroes. The city of Morelia was named after him.

On Hidalgo's left is the standard of the Virgin of Guadalupe which was removed from the Church of Atotonilco in a nearby town on the following day to be used as a banner in the campaign to rally Indian enthusiasm. It is interesting to note that a couple of centuries earlier, Hernando Cortez had made use of a similar banner of the Virgin Mary in his march to Tenochitlan.

Finally, Father Hidalgo, the key figure in the mural, is standing just to the right of center with Aldama pointing to him. He is holding a letter in his right hand symbolizing his authority as a learned man, a man with great depth of understanding of social problems and a powerful ability to express himself both in letters and in his speeches. He became the leader of the independence movement and though he had no military experience, was named Captain General. Hidalgo's army grew to 80,000 before finally being dispersed upon attempting to enter Mexico City. A few months later, Hidalgo, along with Allende, Aldama, and José

Mariano were captured on their way to Texas where they had hoped to regroup their army. They were all shot to death, Hidalgo first being excommunicated. While Aldama shifted the blame to Hidalgo, Allende begged for mercy. Hidalgo never asked for forgiveness, realizing that time would verify his actions. The heads of these four soldiers were cut off and were placed on the corners of the Alondiga de Granaditas (granary) in Guanajuanto.

Nowhere in America is history manifested in quite such an explosive and violent form. At the same time, the issues and intricacies of the developments of 1810 were so cloudy that the true contributions of Hidalgo and his colleagues remained unverified and unacknowledged for fifty years thereafter.

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